

Context Clues

1 Teach/Model

To show how a reader can use context clues to figure out the meaning of a new word, display and read aloud this sentence:

Jorge's house is spacious, but mine is small and narrow.

Point to *spacious* and say: ***Spacious* is a difficult word. I wonder what it means. I'm going to look at other words in the sentence to find clues, or hints, to help me figure out what *spacious* means.**

Circle *small* and *narrow* and explain that these are context clues. Say: **A context clue is a hint. It is a word or group of words near a word you don't know. It helps you guess what the new word means.**

Model using the context clues to guess a meaning for *spacious*: **The word *but* tells me that *spacious* contrasts *small* and *narrow*. So *spacious* must mean large and wide.** Try the meaning in the sentence. Then point out that this type of context clue contrasts words (*spacious/small, narrow*), and that words such as *but*, *however*, and *instead* often introduce a contrast.

Also discuss context clues that give examples of the unfamiliar word: *I sent many missives, including a letter, an e-mail note, and a card.*

To Use Context Clues

1. Look for clues, or hints, around a word you don't know.
2. Use the clues to guess a meaning for the word.

2 Practice

Use the **Multi-Level Strategies** to tailor the practice to students' proficiency levels:

BEGINNING

Copy the sentences from the Intermediate section below. Read each one aloud. Help students identify the context clues. Say: ***Talk a lot contrasts reserved. How does talk a lot help you understand reserved?* (If talk a lot contrasts reserved, reserved must mean doesn't talk a lot or quiet.)** Continue with the other two sentences.

INTERMEDIATE

Have partners copy these sentences and circle context clues for the underlined words. Then have them use the clues to guess meanings for the words and try the meanings in the sentences.

1. I am reserved at school, but I talk a lot at home. (*quiet*)
2. The artist drew dots, loops, and other doodles on the paper. (*silly marks*)
3. That poem confuses me. It's too hard to comprehend. (*understand*)

ADVANCED

Have students complete the Intermediate task and then tell what kind of context clue is given in each sentence. (1. contrast; 2. example; 3. example)

3 Apply

Have students apply the skill in a book at their independent reading levels:

● The Time Machine

Copy the sentences below and read each one aloud. Tell students the meanings of the underlined words. Then have them circle what context clues are used and how they help in understanding the underlined word.

1. The time machine became fainter, until it disappeared.
(harder to see)
2. The Time Traveler was very tired because he explored the future for many days with no letup. (rest)
3. The Time Traveler was happy he could see the future, but it was a pity the world became a bad place. (sad thing)

● ● Letters from Rifka

Partners copy these sentences and circle context clues for the underlined words. Then they should guess meanings for the words and try the meanings in the sentences.

1. Rifka was sniffing because she was sad that the candlesticks were stolen. (crying)
2. The boat almost sank in the wind and waves of the tempest. (storm)
3. Water from the waves of the storm drenched Rifka. (soaked)

● ● ● The Man Who Went to the Far Side of the Moon

Have students find the following words. Students should then use context clues to guess the meanings. Then have them say what kind of clues they are—contrast or example.

1. *isolated* on page 12 (alone, example)
2. *jotted* on page 29 (wrote, example)
3. *three-dimensional* on page 46 (showing depth, contrast).

CLOSE AND ASSESS

Have students explain context clues and how to use them. Then have them name two types of clues. (Context clues are hints around a word that help you guess what a new word means. *Contrast* and *example* are two kinds of context clues.)